

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 04409

STADIS////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: EAIR, FR, UK, US
SUBJECT: CIVAIR: US-UK AVIATION NEGOTIATIONS--
POSSIBLE CURTAILMENT OR CESSATION OF AIR SERVICES
IN NO-AGREEMENT SITUATION

REF: STATE 30234

1. FRENCH REACTION TO US RETALIATION AGAINST BRITISH
AIRWAYS CONCORDE SERVICE WOULD DEPEND ON WHICH OF THE
TWO HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS MENTIONED PARA 2 REFTEL
WOULD OCCUR. IN EITHER CASE AIR FRANCE WOULD STAND TO
PROFIT IN THAT IT WOULD PROBABLY PICK UP SOME OF THE
TRAFFIC LOST TO BRITISH AIRWAYS, THOUGH THE GAIN
WOULD NOT BE CONSIDERABLE SINCE AIR FRANCE
CONCORDES ARE ALREADY OPERATING TO WASHINGTON WITH
HIGH LOAD FACTORS AND WOULD PROBABLY DO AS WELL IF
NOT BETTER IN SERVICE TO NEW YORK. ANYWAY WE DO NOT
CONSIDER THAT THIS PRACTICAL ASPECT OF THE QUESTION
WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCE FRENCH REACTION.

2. WE SUSPECT THAT IN EITHER OF THE TWO HYPOTHETICAL
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SITUATIONS THE GOF WOULD PROBABLY REFRAIN FROM
OFFICIAL COMMENT ON A MATTER THAT IS NOT ITS DIRECT
CONCERN. HOWEVER, THE GOF WOULD LIKELY BE
PREOCCUPIED BY ANY DEVELOPMENT THAT COULD
CONCEIVABLY AFFECT COMMUNITY REACTION (E.G., FEWER
BRITISH FLIGHTS MEANS LESS NOISE) AT US AIRPORTS
CONCORDE SERVES AND HENCE THE CLIMATE THAT WILL

EXIST WHEN THE SIXTEEN-MONTH TRIAL PERIOD ENDS AND THE US DEBATE OVER CONCORDE RISKS HEATING UP AGAIN. IT IS POSSIBLE THEREFORE THAT THE GOF COULD PRIVATELY EXPRESS TO US SOME CONCERN OVER CURTAILMENT OF BRITISH AIRWAYS CONCORDE SERVICE AS IT MIGHT AFFECT OVER THE LONGER TERM A SITUATION IN WHICH THE GOF AND AIR FRANCE ALSO HAVE MUCH AT STAKE.

3. IN THE CASE OF THE FIRST HYPOTHESIS--I.E., RETALIATION DIRECTED AGAINST BRITISH AIRWAYS CONCORDE SERVICE ONLY--REACTION OF FRENCH PUBLIC OPINION WOULD BE NEGATIVE AND SWIFT. OUR SINGLING OUT AND THUS "DISCRIMINATING" AGAINST BRITISH AIRWAYS CONCORDES WOULD BE SEEN AS CONFIRMING WHAT SO MANY FRENCH HAD BEEN SAYING FOR SO LONG, NAMELY, CONCORDE'S TROUBLES IN THE US HAVE BEEN THE RESULT OF ANTI-CONCORDE BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION INSPIRED BY PROTECTIONIST SENTIMENTS, JEALOUSY OF EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY, ETC. IF IN THE MEANTIME CONCORDE HAS BEEN DEFINITELY DENIED ACCESS TO NEW YORK, THE COUNTER-REACTION WOULD ALREADY BE BAD ENOUGH IN FRANCE WITHOUT OUR PROVIDING MORE AMMUNITION TO BE USED AGAINST US. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE DECISION IN NEW YORK WILL HAVE BEEN FAVORABLE AND CONCORDE ISSUE WILL HAVE THUS BEEN REMOVED, TEMPORARILY AT LEAST, AS AN IRRITANT IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH FRANCE, IT WOULD BE BEST TO AVOID, IF WE COULD, ANY ACTION THAT WOULD REVIVE CONTROVERSY IN FRANCE OVER US ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONCORDE. WHILE SATISFACTORY RESOLUTION OF OUR CIVIL DIFFERENCES WITH THE UK IS IMPORTANT, SO IS

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THE MAINTENANCE OF OVER-ALL GOOD RELATIONS WITH FRANCE (AND UK) IN WHICH CONCORDE AS AN ISSUE HAS ACQUIRED IMPORTANCE THAT FAR TRANSCENDS ITS PURELY CIVIL ASPECTS. THE FIRST HYPOTHESIS MENTIONED PARA 2 REFTEL IS THUS A PANDORA'S BOX THAT WE WOULD MUCH PREFER TO SEE NOT OPENED.

4. WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE ANY NEGATIVE FRENCH REACTION TO SECOND HYPOTHESIS MENTIONED PARA 2 REFTEL PROVIDED CURTAILMENT OF CONCORDE SERVICE WERE PART OF GENERAL RETALIATION AGAINST BRITISH AIRWAYS. PROBLEM HERE, OF COURSE, WOULD BE HOW TO MAKE THIS CREDIBLE, ESPECIALLY SINCE NO US CARRIER OPERATES A CORRESPONDING SST SERVICE.

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